MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

Address

TO

THE STUDENTS,

DELIVERED AT THE CLOSE OF THE SESSION, 1884-5,

BY

T. SADLER, PH.D.,

VISITOR.

"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."

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GENTLEMEN,

We have now reached the close of another session of Manchester New College; and it is for me, as one of the Visitors of the College, to offer you a few parting words. Both from what I have observed during the examination, and from other opportunities of forming a judgment, I think I may congratulate you on the work which has been done, and which, I think, shows that you are doing your part faithfully and well towards the special object of your studies in this place. The requirements for admission on the foundation, the duration of your studies, and all the arrangements of this College are, as I need hardly remind you, with a view to your being placed in the first rank of an educated ministry. And not without deep interest and sympathy can I think of that part of your life through which you are now passing. Those old student days lose nothing by being looked back upon from a distance. The quiet of them—the companionship in them—the opportunities they afford of a culture which is not mere self-culture, but a culture with a view to future service—the hope that has not yet been dashed by disappointment—the consciousness of unfolding powers which have not yet found their

limit,—these, with the natural zest of early manhood, are memories which, always clear and pleasant, are never so fresh and bright as in the presence of those who are still enjoying the advantages of their student days.

It would take too much time, and indeed be quite needless, to enlarge on the wide field of knowledge and thought in which your attention is engaged; but I may glance at the leading aims of that higher education by which it is hoped the best may be done for you, and by you, to fit you for your accepted calling.

First, there is the linguistic equipment, by which you will be able to read the Scriptures in the original tongues; be familiar with that language which has been employed as the common language of the learned of all countries; and have access to the choicest foreign biblical and theological literature of recent times. Next, there will be careful inquiry into the origin and interpretation of the various books of the Bible, the two subjects helping one another by observation of the gradual development of the great religious ideas and beliefs which culminate in the religion of Christ. A third main department is that of the history of religion and of the Christian Church. Of the latter I will say nothing, as it has always formed part of an education for the ministry. Of the former I may say that it would be strange if you should not be made acquainted with the Bibles and founders of the ancient heathen religions, seeing that the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge has thought it worth while to publish, under the head of "Non-Christian Religious Systems," handbooks respecting Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Mahomedanism, by such writers as Rhys Davids and Sir Wm. Muir. If it be asked how Bibles so much inferior to our own can help

us, my answer is, that they may do what no single Bible could do; they may deepen our sense of the reality of religion by showing how universal is the evidence of man's religious nature; and, as from the children around us there come sometimes sayings which we like to remember, so religion in its childhood has left us simple and beautiful utterances of the natural piety of the human heart, which mingle sweetly with the fuller tones of a maturer faith. Then you have to do with the vast domain of moral and religious philosophy, which has latterly been considerably extended, in order to include more fully the bearing of physical science on man's intellectual and spiritual nature.

Such, in brief, is the field of your labours during your student days; and, though you have a lengthened period for your studies, it cannot be supposed that you can go over this field more than in part. But you are introduced to it under efficient guidance; you learn to study in a systematic way; and you become acquainted with the best aids to further investigation.

There is no occasion to claim for this higher education more than can certainly be shown to belong to it. It cannot make you more or other than you are. It cannot give you any new faculty; it cannot engraft on you a talent or inspire you with genius, or enable you in any way to exceed the natural dimensions of your souls; but it may quicken and develop the gifts that are in you—it may make the most of you—it may furnish you with resources which would greatly add to your usefulness. It may be that you will fall in with men who, without your advantages, can do more and better than you can, through their having gifts which you do not possess in an equal degree; but I believe that, in most instances, such men would be the last to deny that your

advantages are real, at least so far as they go. Doubtless the childlike spirit may understand things that are hidden from the wise and prudent, and the pure in heart may see things which cannot be seen by the scholar and the critic; but to doubt that a most luminous and comprehensive mind may be combined with a pure heart and a childlike spirit would be to forget that this College has had a John James Tayler among its Principals.

What is expected of you, Gentlemen, is that you will fill well a place which requires to be filled by men who have been provided with the best means of education. There are great questions connected with science, philosophy, Biblical criticism, morals, religion, which can only be dealt with in a satisfactory manner by those who have the qualifications and the habits of the scholar. These qualifications are within your reach; and these habits it is hoped may be formed in you. The lectures to which you listen will not accomplish their object unless they bring you into communication with the sources of knowledge. Those who receive their knowledge at second hand are in danger of falling into one of two extremes—either that of refusing to inquire into what is new, lest it should have a disturbing influence, or that of jumping at everything that is new, in order, as they think, to be well abreast of the thought of the age. You will be able to weigh for yourselves what is to be said for and against the new theory, and so to exercise an independent judgment. Your position is that which was described long ago in the following words: "I mean that any young man, and much more any old one, when he sees or hears anything strange or unaccustomed, does not at once run to embrace it, but stands considering, like a person who, where different ways meet, asks which is the way, and will not move forward till he is satisfied that he is going

right." * You will distinguish between questions which are settled in the view of competent authorities, and those questions which are still in suspense, waiting the results of continued research; and I must add, that a knowledge as to who *are* authorities and who not, is one of the main gains of such a course of study as that which you are pursuing. This knowledge will go with you all your lives; and I may mention one respect in which it will be of essential service to you, viz., in the formation of a library of authors whom you can consult with confidence, that in them you have the best that has been written on the subjects in which you are most interested. And not only will you be fortified in your own views by authorities to whom you look up, but also, so far as you have to oppose the views of others, you will meet those views as set forth by their ablest representatives, and not imagine you have taken a fortress when you have only struck down one of its feeblest defenders.

In considering what may be expected of you from your higher education, not only must range of knowledge be taken into account, but also the trained powers and the "disciplined intelligence" which should qualify you for better workmanship than would otherwise be possible to you; and, in some respects, workmanship of a different kind. You will go more into first principles, and not be empirical. You will trust more to carefully thinking out your subject and presenting it as a whole, than to finding in it passing opportunities for saying good things. You will be intent rather on forming the minds of your hearers by building on a solid foundation than on the incidental effect which may be produced by the telling hit, or by what Emerson has called "the hurrah for our side." If a doubt should suggest itself whether what I am saying would not tend to make you

* Plato's "Laws." Book VII.

preachers for the few rather than the many, my answer is that I think your preaching should be for *some* rather than others. I do not think all men can be best fitted for all sorts of work; and I *do* think your appeal should be to the more intelligent and thoughtful, who, however, are to be found in all classes and are by no means a few; and who may be, and should as far as possible be, increased in number. In some respects a cultivated minister has a decided advantage in addressing plain sensible men; for by his precision in the use of words, and by his chastened tone, he has a characteristic simplicity of his own; and the higher and purer his culture is the less likely is he to indulge in pedantry or parade. Where sensational preaching is wanted, I would not counsel you to undertake it; for I think you should aim at something better. You may recognise the value, and for some people the necessity, of a style of preaching like that of Mr. Moody, which reckons its success by the number of its converts from day to day; but you may still prefer for yourselves to have some lowly part in the impression produced on the religious thought and the religious life of the age by the services of such men as Maurice and Robertson, Dean Stanley and Channing.

Among the special advantages of this College, I must mention its "original principle of freely imparting theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular theological doctrines." By this, of course, is not meant that your professors are either to have no views of their own, or, if they have, are to conceal them from you. We know that they have views of their own, and what these views are. If they had no views of their own, it would be a sign that freedom had failed in them of its highest hope; and if, having views of their own, they were bound to conceal them, I cannot understand how they or this College

could be called free. But no one can properly be a student who is not free to know all there is to be known. You may read in your Plato: "A freeman ought to be a freeman in the acquisition of knowledge." So your Professors do their best, in all candour and fairness, to make you thoroughly acquainted with the subjects of your study; and if you should be drawn to some other point of view than that which most commends itself to them, they would not regret that they had not kept you in ignorance, and would resort to no methods by which constraint might be put on your conscience. If we are to insist on certain doctrinal beliefs, our best plan will be to consult oracles, and not to study at all. There is even more in freedom than might at first sight appear. Its effects extend to our whole inward nature. It is to the mind what fresh air and broad daylight and an open prospect are to the body. It gives clearness to the perceptions, vigour to the understanding, and catholicity to the spirit. Nor have our liberal churches any reason to complain of the practical result of this principle of their adoption; for I think I am right in saying, that as large a proportion of our students enter our pulpits as is the case in the educational establishments of the Church of England with its Act of Uniformity, or in the Pastors' College connected with the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

I need not tell you, Gentlemen, that you are not here simply to look around you, and make up your minds what shall be your occupation, and what religious body you shall join, for to two things you are committed: first, to an earnest intention to devote yourselves to the ministry; and secondly, to the direction of your sympathies. To these you are committed, not irrevocably, but honestly, and after serious consideration.

You bring with you a calling, which will be present to

you during the whole course of your studies, and which will constantly remind you of your need of a still higher preparation than that higher education of which I have spoken. You cannot make the mistake of supposing that when you have received a superior intellectual culture, there is no more for you to do. This might enable you to talk and write about religion, but, without the *theologia pectoris*, would leave you powerless to touch the deeper springs of the soul. Nor will even the love of God select you, if it be only in the contemplative stage, and have not passed into that stage in which it kindles your human sympathies, and inflames you with the desire to be the instruments of His beneficence to your fellow-men.

What you will want most of all is that without which the great teachers of religion have felt that they could do nothing—*the Spirit of God*; that spirit, not in any exceptional form by which you might become seers of visions and dreamers of dreams, but as the source of all faith, and all love, and all virtue, as the life of religion and humanity in the human soul. It is only through the divine within us that we can in any proper sense have the vocation of divines. It is only through God dwelling in us that we can do God's work in the world. As out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh, we find ourselves offering many prayers; but there is one prayer that has in it the substance and essence of all praying,—it is that we may have *more of God in us*. What are all our other prayers in comparison with this? But seek inspiration through any channels by which God works in us to will and to do; for, if you did not believe in such channels, you would not yourselves think of being among them. Among the chief benefits you will take with you from this College will be the "companions of your

solitude," whose living touch will have already made itself felt by you in your reading, including some who, though they may not help you by their knowledge or thought, may yet help you through the spirit they are of. We have no truer helpers than those by being with whom our spiritual affections are quickened. Science teaches us that life only can produce life; and if this be true of physical life, it is not less true of that life which is "energy of love." This, perhaps, may account for Renan's remark that "the mystics have almost always been powerful organisers." The characteristic of their piety is that it consists rather in personal communion than in assent to propositions. Certainly, in the greatest religious movements we are brought into contact with the mystics, if not as prime movers, yet as preparers of the way, or as the close friends and allies of those who have been prominent in action. There are few books in which there is more about the mystics than in Ullmann's "Reformers before the Reformation." What is that volume which Luther has under his arm? If it be not the Bible, there is much more probability that it is the "Theologia Germanica," or Tauler's "Nachfolgung," or Staupitz on "The Love of God," than anything from or about Huss, or Savonarola, or Wicliffe.* The reason of this is that, if

* "If we consider what it was which, ere they appeared upon the stage of the Reformation, made Luther and its other heroes what they were, and equipped them for their parts, we shall find that it was by no means the example of a Huss, a Savonarola, and other martyrs of the kind. Neither was it the writings and doctrines of Wicliffe, but totally different elements of Christian experience and theology with which they nourished their minds. Their spiritual food was derived mainly from the Biblical and sound mystical divines of Germany and the Netherlands, at the close of the 14th, and in the course of the 15th century.—*Ullmann's "Reformers before the Reformation." Preface.*

a man have a hard battle to fight in the world, he finds the needed quiet and strength in communion with men in whose presence he breathes an atmosphere of divine love.

In the existing state of things, the claims on a minister's time for practical objects, more or less excellent, are so urgent and manifold that, unless he is resolute in holding sacred his "stille Stunden," he may be wholly deprived of them. It is said of Dr. Chalmers, that the pressing activities around him wrung from him the cry, uttered with pain, "We are bustled out of our spirituality." I would earnestly say to you, for the sake of those to whom you will minister, take care that you are not bustled out of your spirituality. We want, as Rothe declared, "not rest, but quiet;" quiet in which freely to receive that we may freely give. In the after-student time lay not aside the character of the student. You will study men more by the light of practical experience; but shut not out the contemplative mood, and keep up your intercourse with the greatest minds of the past. Your studies here will not have had their desired effect, if they lead you to love your books rather than your congregation; but, on the other hand, you will be able to do more for your congregation if you continue also to love your books. If we would apply a higher law to the family, the neighbourhood, the city, and the nation, we must have a higher law to apply, and be strong in that law. We must not be so intent on the streams only, as virtually to cut them off from the fountain. The true saints of old have in them the elements out of which new saints are to be made. Neglect the "great dead and their great thoughts," and you neglect the living with their living wants. Neglect private devotion, and you neglect your public office. Intercourse with heaven is essential to the truest performance of our duties on earth.

The recognition of this great truth is especially involved in the calling of the minister. Out of the depths of human sin and weakness, and sorrow, his cry is unto God; and from the heights of God his cry is unto the children of men.

When, therefore, you think what you are preparing for, and how soon these days, with all their opportunities, will be to you the old student days, you will see how important it is that you should let nothing interfere with this preparation. On it will depend the breadth and depth of the foundation on which you will build throughout your ministry. Be not impatient to begin what is to be your work. Preparation *is* your work now—the best possible work for you now—a work which is of the nature of consecration. There is, of course, a preparation which consists in exercise; and, therefore, you are called upon, to a certain extent, to teach and to preach for the sake of practice. But all now should be regarded by you as preparatory. "This one thing I do." And if, through any haste to forestall your ministry while you are still students, the basis of your future usefulness should be less wide and less solid than it might have been, you will find out your mistake too late, and never cease to regret it.

My Friends, we all know that this day closes, not the session only, but also something else. It is not for me to give adequate expression to the sorrow we must all feel at such a parting; but I could not sit down without briefly adverting to an event which is foremost in the thoughts of every one of us. Our most revered teacher and leader and friend will not quit the chair which he has so long occupied without knowing well the place he will always have in our hearts, and how profoundly sensible all the students and all the friends of this College are of the inestimable worth of

the work he has done—a worth to be reckoned not only by what it has been in the past, but even still more for what we are sure is laid up in it for the future. For myself, I can truly say that to him more than to any other I owe the depth of my conviction that my faith in Christ, in God, in Immortality has a secure resting-place in the everlasting principles of human nature; to him more than any other my realisation of spiritual freedom, with its high responsibilities, its stimulus to aspiration and endeavour, and its glorious hopes. And who is there among us who would not say the same? In other religious bodies, as well as our own, he is, if I mistake not, the one who above all others is looked to as the champion of the spirit in man, against those who contend that man is a body only; and of man's relation to the divine, against those who maintain that, if the divine be not altogether a delusion, it is, at all events, a blank to us. When heat was applied to an ancient coin, the inscription on which had become illegible, the words *Deo gloria* came out; so he has shown us by the light and warmth of our higher nature the inscription which the Agnostic and the mere Materialist have been unable to read. You, Gentlemen, will cherish the memory of your college days all the more that they were under his fostering care, and that you received his parting words; and those who come after you will think with an allowable envy of the privilege you have enjoyed.

But with all our feeling of regret, there will mingle deep gratitude, that what we must now lose has been continued so long; and that, though he rests from his labours here, we shall have him still amongst us, and not simply the "lengthened memories," which are so precious to us. We shall turn, also, to the thought that though the printed

page cannot be all that there is in the living voice, it may reach much farther, and last much longer, and exercise its influence on a much larger scale. Nor can it be without real satisfaction, both to us and our dear and venerated friend himself, that his labours will be carried on by a staff of Professors, to all of whom he has been as a spiritual father, and that in the interests of this College we may have the fullest confidence in the sons thus reared to "hand on the torch of life from one generation to another."



H. Rawson and Co., Printers, Manchester.—[1858.]